DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 342 565 RC 018 518

AUTHOR Martin-Reynolds, JoAnne; And Others
TITLE A Case Study of Perceptions of Student Character Development in a Small Rural School.
PUB DATE 17 Mar 91
NOTE 12p.; In: Reaching Our Potential: Rural Education in the 90's. Conference Proceedings, Rural Education Symposium (Nashville, TN, March 17-20, 1991); see RC 018 473.
PUB TYPE Speeches/Conference Papers (150) -- Reports - Research/Technical (143)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Academic Achievement; Dropout Characteristics; *High Risk Students; High Schools; *Moral Development; *Personality Development; Rural Schools; Sex Differences; Small Schools; Student Attitudes; *Student Characteristics; Teacher Attitudes; *Time Management; *Values

ABSTRACT

As part of an ongoing research project, this study examined the relationship between character traits and school variables, home variables, and personal variables. Freshman and sophomore students from a small rural high school in Ohio were selected for the study based on their scores on the Character Trait Questionnaire (CTQ). The CTQ contains 12 hypothetical situations representing the character traits of courage, justice, temperance, and wisdom. Each student completed a self rating and was then rated by three randomly selected peers and three teachers. Students rated in the top 20% were identified as having high character scores, while the students rated in the lowest 30% were identified as having low character scores. Two years later, 33 of these students were interviewed using questions based on a national survey involving time-use diaries. Students in the high-character group spent more time studying than the low-character group, but the low-character group spent more hours working outside the home. The high-character group was composed of 80% girls, while the low-character group tended to be approximately 50% girls and 50% boys. The high-character group had a mean grade point average of 3.40 and the low-character group had a mean grade point average of 1.91. Comparisons are made with studies of time use in Japanese children. The report contains six figures comparing students' use of time. (KS)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED342565

NRSSC PRESENTATION
Presenter: JoAnne Martin-Reynolds
Co-Presenter: Bill Reynolds
Rodney W. Bauer
Day: March 17, 1991
Time: 10:30am - 12:00pm

A Case Study of Perceptions of Student Character Development in a Small Rural School

RC018518

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Doris Helge

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

☑ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

JoAnne Martin-Reynolds, Bill
Reynolds & Rodney W. Bauer
529 Education Bldg
Bowling Green St University
Bowling Green, Ohio 43403

A Case Study of Perceptions of Student Character Development in a Small Rural School

The purpose of this paper is to describe and share the progress of an on-going research project concerning attempts to define and ultimately measure student character development in rural school settings. To this end, information will be shared regarding the development of an instrument used to identify student character scores as perceived by teachers, peers and self. Due to the nature of this in-progress dissertation research study, however, not all of the data can be shared in its fullest detail.

The instrument and its data collection process present a practical way to begin to identify students who are perceived as role models for others as well as those who may be at-risk of dropping out of school. Variables such as grades earned in school and teacher appraisal (Barrington & Hendricks, 1989)[1] have been reported as predictors of dropouts and will be discussed in relation to character scores of students in this sample. In addition, student use of time will also be explored, especially as it relates to study habits, television viewing and working outside the home. Other studies comparing time use by age, sex and culture in relation to television viewing and study time may have some bearing on at-risk factors.[2] The paucity of research on early identification of dropouts has been lamented in the literature (Rumberger, 1987).[3] This study makes a contribution to this documented need.

Perspectives

Recently, many writers and researchers have begun to reexamine the complex questions of character development, moral education, ethics and values in the context of the school (Wynne, 1980; Sizer, 1984; Ryan, 1986, Wilson 1985; Bennett, 1985).[4] Professional organizations have also published reports and recommendations for reemphasizing moral education and character education in the schools. The Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development (1988)[5] published a report "Moral Education in the Life of the School," outlining guidelines for school districts to follow in developing curriculum models and community support for making moral education a part of the school's program. The authors of the report note that the moral tone of the school is reflected in school climate (Power, 1983; Beane and Lipka, 1986, Mortimore and Sammons, 1987, Grant, 1988, Rutter, 1979)[6], in the hidden curriculum (Beane and Lipka, 1986), and should be examined and articulated in curriculum content, evaluation techniques and extracurricular activities (p. 32-33).[7] The National School Boards Association (1987)[8] has also

RC 018518

published recommendations for schools and communities titled, "Building Character in the Public Schools: Strategies for Success."

If we ask why this is happening, we begin to find answers in diverse settings, but especially in areas concerning social issues and the economy. In 1986, James Wilson wrote the lead article in the 20th anniversary issue of **The Public Interest** entitled, "The Rediscovery of Character: Private Virtue and Public Policy," in which he expressed the public's deepening concern for the fostering of character in our citizens. A 1986 report by the Committee for Economic Development, commissioned by some of the country's top business leaders suggests that the inculcation of positive character traits constitutes an invisible curriculum that the schools are neglecting. According to the report, "Investing in Our Children," the schools frequently fail to stress even such basics as teamwork, honesty, self-discipline and reliability. The business world counts character and work habits as at least as important as academic skills in determining employability.

The employment issue is compounded by statistics that tell us that 13% of high school graduates can't read and write beyond the sixth grade level. Twenty-eight percent of 17-18 year olds do not complete high school. The American Association of School Administrators' 1989 publication, Teens in Crisis, reported that a quarter to one-half (depending on ethnic origins) of youth are dropping out of school. Of these, more than half will not be employed.

Are communities concerned? Yes. At the national level, the Gallup Poll found nearly 80% of the people in 1975 and 1980 in favor of teaching morals and moral behavior in the public schools. On the local level in the rural schools districts, we found evidence to support this same view in the schools, with 83% of the community respondents (N=1200) supporting teaching morals in the schools.

Background

Some background information on our research thus far is in order here so that the reader might be aware of related and pertinent information about this topic. What were some questions we asked of respondents in our previous samples? First of all, what school programs and policies could be identified as teaching values, either formally or informally? The districts' high schools' written policies (including discipline & student and teacher in-school behaviors) did include guidelines and statements concerning character, moral and civic education as did some curricular and extracurricular activities. (For more detailed information, see Martin-Reynolds, J. and Reynolds, B. "Character Development in Small Rural Schools, 1991 and "Extracurricular Activities in Rural Schools, 1990).[9]

Secondly, we explored the shared school and community expectations for adults and children in school. In looking closely at elementary programs in the three districts, the authors concluded that small rural schools and their staffs

were able to address and communicate shared community/ school values and expectations to students through a number of direct and indirect approaches.[10]

Thirdly, what evidence was there of community attitudes toward school, teachers, and administrators? To check this, surveys of teachers (N=120), community members (N=1200) and students (N=700) in the three rural districts were conducted to determine perceptions of respondents as to their views of how the schools, teachers, administrators and students were perceived to reflect the traits of courage, justice, temperance and wisdom. On average, teachers agreed more so than the other two groups that the schools (85%), teachers (88%), administrators/school board members (79%) and students (64%) behaved in a manner reflecting courage, justice, temperance & wisdom.[11] Because the character traits embodied in the cardinal virtues have been deemed prerequisite to effective citizenship, they were selected as standards by which to identify behaviors and values appropriate for student character development.

The Study

The population for this particular phase of the study was the cohort group of students at one school district who were freshmen or sophomore students during the 1986-87 school year. The high school is a small high school of about 275 students in grades 9-12 in a rural area of northwest Ohio. The students responded to the Character Trait Questionnaire (CTQ), and completed general student surveys. The rate of response for students on the CTQ was 100%, with make-up tests provided. Follow-up interviews with students identified in the upper 20% and lower 30% of the group were conducted two years later, in 1989.

Instrument

The Character Trait Questionnaire (CTQ) was developed by three researchers, using a round robin technique to generate simulated situations so that subjects might contemplate the behaviors involved in making ethical and value judgments and decisions based on everyday occurances in school settings. The CTQ is based on operational examples of the four virtues selected to represent character as defined in the cardinal virtues, courage, justice, temperance and wisdom. The operational examples give specific behaviors that typify each virtue. Given the variable nature of stated individual ethical and value judgments and actual behaviors of individuals on a day to day basis,[12] the researchers felt it important to have the perceptions of others, in addition to self perception, to serve as an important check on the reliability of the character trait scores. Thus, the CTQ was developed to suit three different views, the self, the peer and the teacher formats.

Twelve hypothetical situations, three representing each of the four character traits, require the respondent to make a choice from a series of 4 responses. The responses were weighted 4,3,2,1, with 4 representing a high degree of the trait to 1 being the lowest. Each subject completes a self rating

and is then rated by three randomly selected peers and three of his/her teachers. Thus, the potential for a high score of 48 or a low score of 12 was possible for each rating. The Cronback Coefficient Alpha was used to test for internal consistency reliability with a population of junior high students (N=90) yielding coefficients of .55 for the CTQ-Self, 1.00 for the CTQ-Peer and .77 for the CTQ-Teacher forms (Hurley, 1991).
13

For interviewing purposes, the results of the self report, peer reports and teacher reports on the CTQ were used to identify two groups of students. The students who were rated in the top 20% were identified as having high character scores while the students who were rated in the lowest 30% were identified as having low character scores.

It was necessary to move to the lowest 30% rather than lowest 20% in order to have students in the sample. This group had experienced a number of missing students in the two years which had passed since the time of the first round of testing. As the principal noted, the instrument did its job well in being able to select those who were at-risk of leaving the school.

The Sample

The students in the follow-up interviews (N=33) were freshmen and sophomores at the time of the original study. It was decided to conduct in-depth interviews with the students in the upper and lower groups as a follow-up study two years later, when they were juniors and seniors to determine what factors might be identified for their own perception or their being perceived as having either high or low character scores.

The cut-off for high scores for self (upper 20% of respondents) was a score of 39 and above; for average peer score, 35.33 and above; for average teacher score, 35.2 and above. The cut-off for low scores for self (lower 30% of respondents) was a score of 34 and below; for average peer, 26.33 and below; for average teacher score, 28. In order to be placed in either the high or low group, students had to have been ranked in two of the three groups (self, peer or teacher).

All nine students in the original group of 9th graders ranked in the upper 20% were still in school as juniors. Only one of the seven original 9th graders ranked in the lower 20% was still in school. Of the lower 30%, two students were still in school. These three students became the lower group sample for the juniors. All ten students in the original group of 10th graders ranked in the upper 20% were still in school as seniors. Four of the original group of eight 10th graders ranked in the lower 20% were still in school. With the addition of those in the lower 30%, four more students were added to make a total of 8 seniors in the lower group sample. Thirteen were interviewed.

An in-depth interview was conducted using, among others, questions based on a national sample and survey involving time use diaries conducted by the Institute for Social Research at the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor,

Michigan, 1985.[14] This sample was based on data collected in a national telephone survey (1981-82) of 300 households examining time use. Of the 400 children involved, 87 were in the age range of 15-17 year-olds. The questions used with the rural student interviews focused on self data, school data and home data. Sample questions included how students spent their time during a typical day, involvement in extracurricular activities, curfew times if any, relationships with parents, responsibilities at home, reasons for going to school, feelings about self and so on. This paper will examine student responses regarding use of time for the 2 groups.

Discussion

One of the research questions asked was: Is there a significant difference in use of time by students who are ranked as having high character scores and those ranked as having low character scores? As can be seen from Tables 1 through 6, students did not differ greatly on amount of time spent in various activities. However, the amount of time respondents reported that they spent studying and working did differ between the two groups. Those in the lower 30% reported spending on average about 55 minutes a day studying compared to 102 minutes for those students in the upper 20%. The data from the ISR sample reported approximately 30 minutes a day in study time for 15-17 year olds. The ISR research makes reference to comparative studies with Japanese children in this age group which note that they spend between 2 and 3 1/2 hours a day studying, indicating a cultural emphasis on academic achievement.[15]

The mean number of hours spent working outside the home for the 2 rural student groups indicated an average of 68 minutes per day for the lower 30% and 16 minutes per day for the upper 20%. There was no national data available for 15-17 year olds regarding time spent on the job, but tv viewing was fairly consistent with the students in the rural study and compared similarly with the Japanese data. Apparently, most students can find time to watch television.

Sex differences and sex role stereotyping could account for some of the variation in time use, especially in areas such as household chores and sports. The ISR sample indicated that the boys spent more time in sports and the girls more time in household chores. This does seem to be having some effect with the rural sample in household chores. The upper 20% group in both grades tended to be made up of approximately 80% girls while the lower 30% group tended to be approximately 50% girls, 50% boys. In the area of household chores, the upper group spent about 30 minutes more time than the lower group on a daily basis. Time spent in sports averaged about the same amount of time for each group.

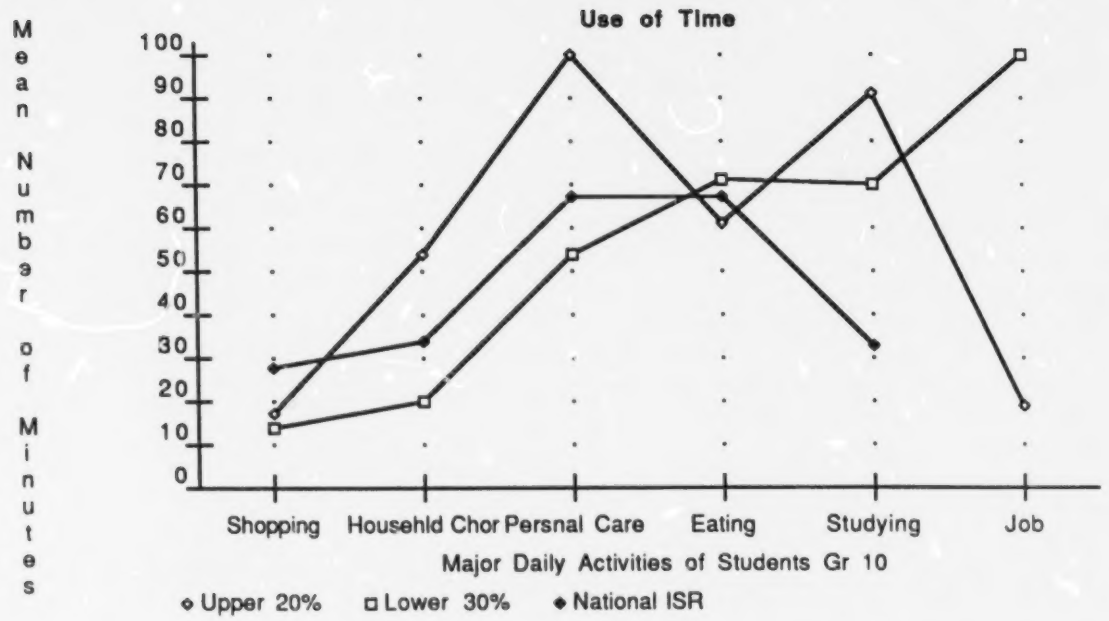

Table 1

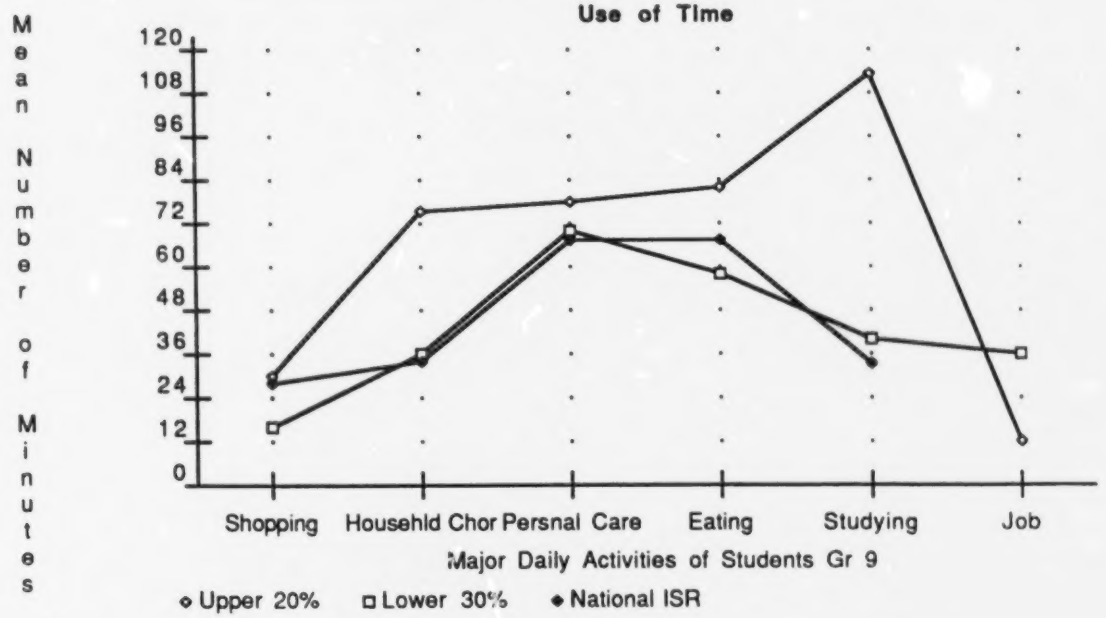

Table 2

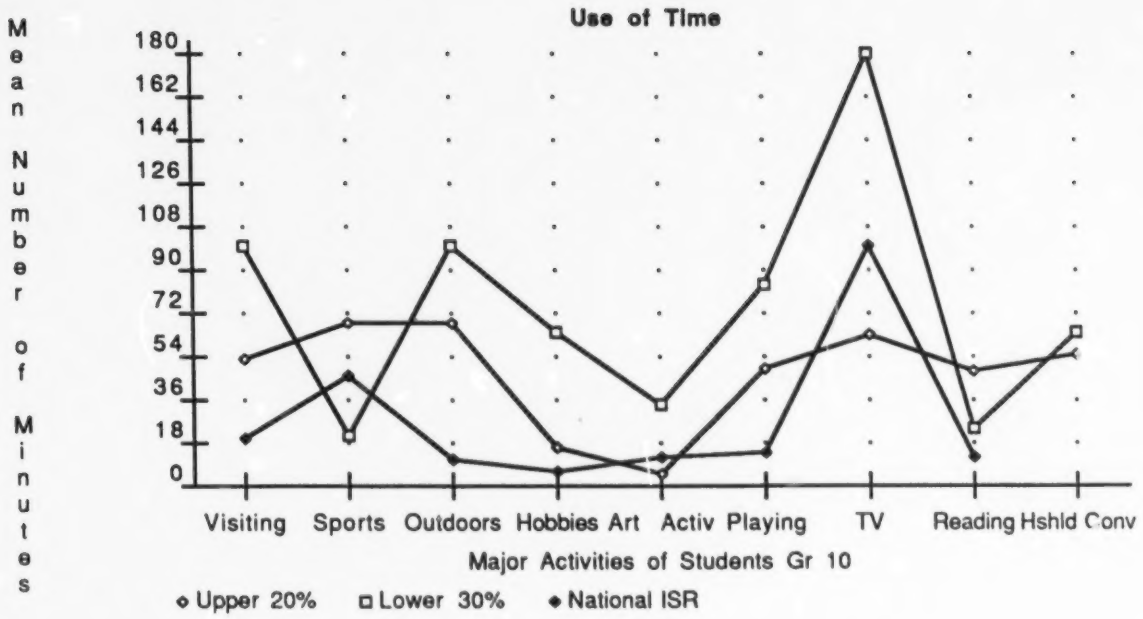

Table 3

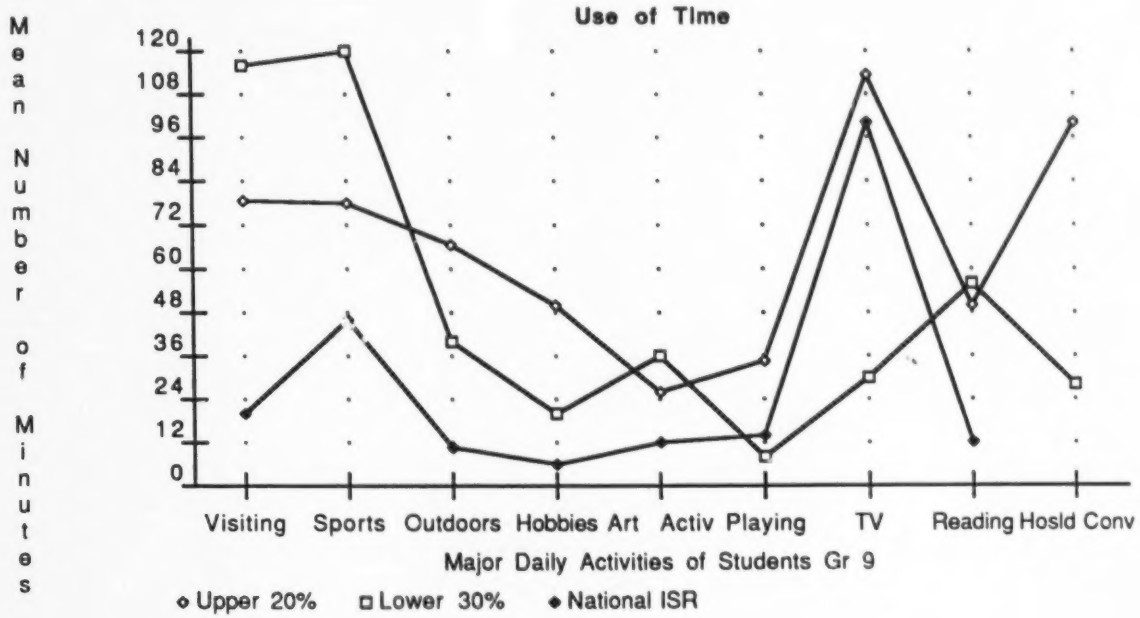

Table 4

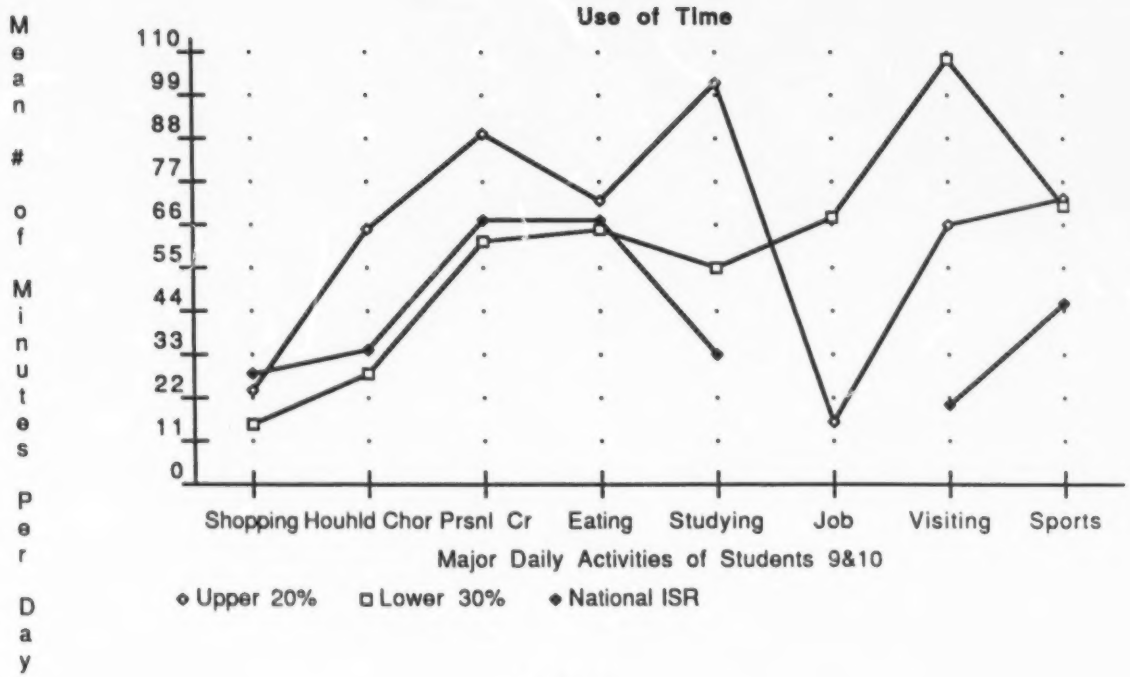

Table 5

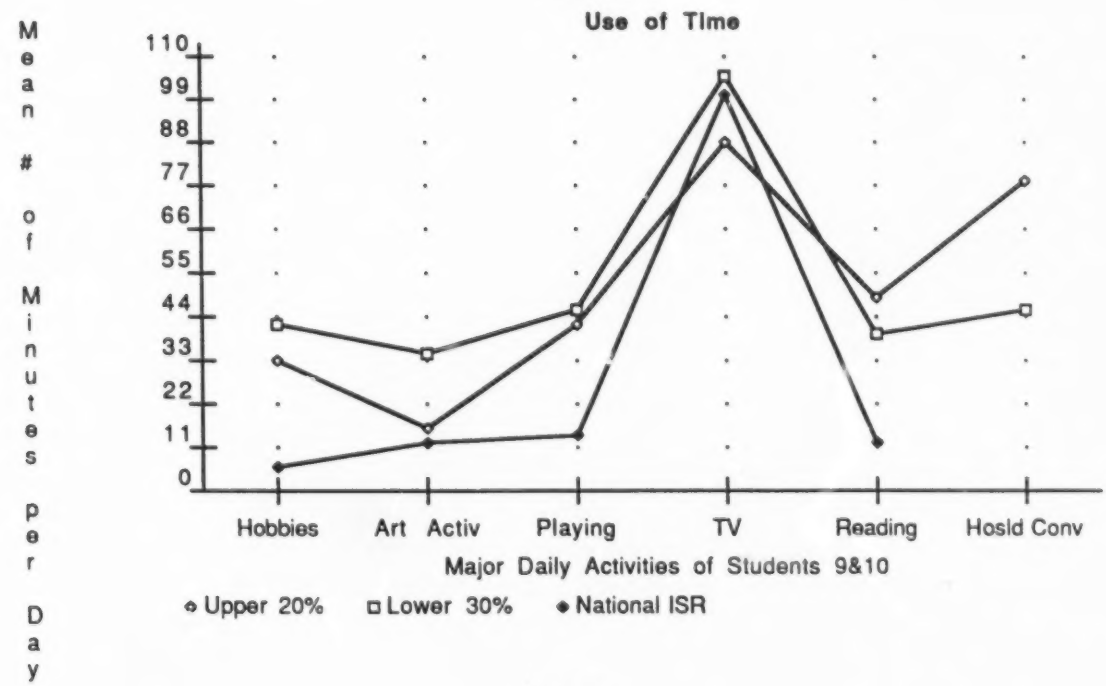

Table 6

In accordance with the literature, it was found that students in the upper group tended to have the higher mean grade point averages (3.40) and students in the lower group tended to have the lower mean grade point averages (1.91). The correlation between the character development score and grade point average was +.64, significant at the .001 level (Bauer, 1991).[16]

Conclusions

Are there links between perceptions of character development, school variables, home variables and personal variables? If so, what good is such information in dealing with at-risk individuals? This on-going study is just beginning to grapple with these questions. The associations between factors such as academic achievement, high and low character development scores, use of time, and so on appear to have some bearing on identification of key factors in high-risk individuals. Such early identification of at-risk students has many practical as well as humane outcomes for students and schools. If their identification can be accomplished early and intervention strategies can be determined to correct behavior patterns or otherwise intercede to change high-risk behaviors, then school personnel have a great stake in such an effort. Too often, school personnel are asked to deal with variables which cannot be readily changed such as cognitive ability or personality. It would be far better for schools and parents to work together to change behaviors regarding student use of time rather than spin our wheels trying to change the unchangeable.

---

[1]Barrington, B.L. & Hendricks, B. differentiating Characteristics of High School graduates, Dropouts, and Nongraduates, The Journal of Educational Research, 82, 309-319, 1989.

[2]Peterson, J.L., & Zill, N. Television Viewing and Children's Intellectual, Social, and Emotional Development, a paper at American Association for Public Opinion Research, May, 1980; Lyle, J., & Hoffman, H."Children's Use of Television and Other Media." In Rubinstein, Comstock, & Murray (eds.) Television and Social Behavior, Reports and Papers: Vol.4: Television in Day to Day Life: Patterns of Use :129-256, Washington, D.C: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1972; Nakanishi, N. "A Report on the 'How do People Spend Their Time Survey' in 1980" Reprinted from Studies of Broadcasting (An International Annual of Broadcasting Science :18, 93-113.

[3]Rumberger, R.W. High School Dropouts: A Review of Issues and Evidence. Review of Educational Research, 57, 101-121, 1987.

[4]Wynne, E. Looking at Schools: Good, Bad, and Indifferent. Lexington, Mass: D.C. Heath, 1980; Sizer, T. Horace's Compromise, Boston: Houghton-Mifflin Company, 1984; Ryan, K. "The New Moral Education," Phi Delta Kappan 68 (October, 1986): 167-70; Wilson, J. "The Discovery of Character: Private Virtue and Public Policy," The Public Interest, 1985; Bennett, W. "Education and Character: Educators in America, Vital Speeches, 51(1985):454.

[5]Ryan, K. (editor) Moral Education in the Life of the School. Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, 1988.

[6]Power, C. "Moral Education Through the Development of the Moral Atmosphere of the School." Journal of Educational Thought, 15(1983):4-9; Beane, J., & Lipka, R. Self-Concept, Self-Esteem, and the Curriculum. New York: Columbia University Press, 1986; Mortimore, P., & Sammons. "New Evidence on Effective Elementary Schools." Educational Leadership, 45(1987):

4-8; Grant, G. The World We Created at Hamilton High. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1988; Rutter, M. et al. Fifteen Thousand Hours: Secondary Schools & Their Effects on Children. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1979.

[7]Ryan, K., op. cit.

[8]National School Boards Association. Building Character in the Public Schools: Strategies for Success. NSBA: Washington, D.C., 1987.

[9]Martin-Reynolds, J. & Reynolds, B. "Character Development in Small Rural Schools" in Moral, Character and Civic Education in the elementary School, (ed) Benninga, J. Teachers College Press, New York, 1991; Martin-Reynolds, J. & Reynolds, B., Extracurricular Activities in Rural Schools," The Rural Educator, 12,1(Fall, 1990):13-20.

[10]Ibid.

[11]Reynolds, B., Martin-Reynolds, J. & Yonker, R. "Fostering Student Character Development in Rural Schools," in Character Development in the Schools, (eds) Martin-Reynolds, J. & Hurley, M., 1987, 61-62.

[12]Witty, P.A. & Lehman, H.C. "The So-Called General Character Test," The Psychological Review, 34: November, 1927:401-3; Jones, V. "Character Development in Children-An Objective Approach," Manual of Child Psychology, Carmichael, L (ed) New York: J. Wiley, 1954.

[13]Hurley, M. An Examination of the Relationship Between A Measure of Student Character and Selected Student Performance Variables. Presentation to dissertation committee, Bowling Green State University, 1991.

[14]Juster, F. & Stafford, F. (eds). Time, Goods, and Well-Being. Survey Research Center, Institute for Social Research, The University of Michigan, 1985.

[15]Nakanishi, op.cit.

[16]Bauer, R.W. Correlates of Character Development in a Small Rural High School. Presentation to doctoral committee at Bowling Green State University, 1991.